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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUDAPEST 000864

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE MOORE.

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SUBJECT: DEBRECEN - FIDESZ FIEFDOM WITH GROWING JOBBIK  
STRENGTH

REF: BUDAPEST 822

Classified By: Political Counselor Paul C. O'Friel for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Opposition party Fidesz has built up a nearly unassailable fiefdom in the eastern city of Debrecen, Hungary's second largest municipality. While the local Socialist party is in tatters, the far-right Jobbik movement appears to be gaining strength, especially among young university students. End Summary.

AN UNASSAILABLE FIDESZ FIEFDOM  
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¶2. (SBU) Stolid, staid Debrecen in eastern Hungary, the seat of the Hungarian Reformed (Presbyterian) Church, has been traditionally known as the "Calvinist Rome." More recently, however, it has gained the title of "Fidesz's Capital." Since 1998, Mayor and deputy Fidesz party leader Lajos Kosa has turned Hungary's second largest city into an almost unassailable opposition party stronghold.

¶3. (C) International investors sing Kosa's praises. One large-scale American investor said unlike Budapest bureaucrats, the pro-business Kosa has been willing to work with him on tax off-sets. In testimony to Kosa's pro-business attitude, the Israeli pharmaceutical firm, TEVA, is in the process of completing a \$100 million expansion of its Debrecen plant.

¶4. (C) A renewed downtown area, renovated tram line, and new shopping malls all attest to Mayor Kosa's dynamism; however, there are some rumblings of discontent beneath the surface. Former Deputy Mayor (2002-2006) and one-time Kosa ally Gabor Turi complains that Kosa has become increasingly autocratic and corrupt. "It's all about a small exclusive circle that controls everything; he (Kosa) is the boss," Turi said, adding that "Mr. 10 percent has become Mr. 20 percent."

¶5. (C) Socialist Party representative Dr. Katalin Levai complains, too, about corruption. Levai alleges utilities, waste management, and water contracts are riddled with graft. Asked about Fidesz's public anti-corruption stance, Levai acidly comments: "They preach water and drink wine." She laments that her party has little future in Debrecen. "Fidesz is in a very comfortable situation here; our party is very weak by comparison." Local government officials, even most school administrators, are all Fidesz party members. "People perceive the only way to get ahead is to fall in line," she commented ruefully. Levai is resigned to losing her seat in next April's general elections, but hopes (perhaps forlornly) that she can reestablish herself in the October 2010 local elections.

BUT GROWING FAR-RIGHT STRENGTH  
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¶16. (C) Although Fidesz dominates the local political scene, the far-right party, Jobbik, appears to be gaining a foothold. Both Turi and Levai note the movement's growing strength. Levai commented that Jobbik's simple anti-Roma message had an appeal, not just to poorer, rural Hungarians, but to more educated doctors and lawyers. "Intellectuals can be racist, too," she said, a comment that Turi separately echoed. Levai put Jobbik's strength in the Debrecen area at 15 percent -- near equal to that of the Socialist Party.

¶17. (C) A session with a cross-section of Debrecen University students revealed widespread antipathy to Roma. Although there are very few Roma at the university and only one student had a Roma neighbor, all the students across the political spectrum harbored stereotypes of Roma as shiftless and lazy petty criminals. One student commented, "Gypsies don't work; they steal and hold the country back," adding, "The problem is not the Magyar Garda, but the Gypsies." Another said, "I don't hate Gypsies; I just hate their culture."

¶18. (C) Asked how representative the students' views were, political science professor Dr. Zoltan Berenyi estimated that approximately 30 percent of the university's 33,000 students either passively or actively supported Jobbik. Support among students in the political science faculty ran as high as 70 percent, with strong support as well in the faculties of law and history.

¶19. (C) Reformed Church Primate, Bishop Gusztav Bolcskei, separately observed that with the economy in turmoil and the current political class discredited in many eyes, Jobbik had

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stepped into the political vacuum. "There is a lack of confidence in the state; police and judges are far removed from people's daily lives and everyone believes the two large parties (Fidesz and the Socialists) are united by their economic interests."

¶110. (C) Bolcskei said he and other members of Hungary's Four Historic Churches (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, and Jewish) had signed a declaration calling on all political parties to oppose extremism and racism during the upcoming election campaign. "We expect all the leading political parties to sign on; the question is what will Jobbik do?" Bolcskei added that he had recently re-read the 1934 Barmen Declaration in which Germany's evangelical churches had proclaimed their opposition to Nazism. "I am struck about how modern the document is," Bolcskei commented. Asked about rumors that far-right Reform minister Lorant Hegedus would run as a Jobbik candidate, Bolcskei sighed, "He (Hegedus) is the cross the Reformed Church has to bear."

¶111. (C) COMMENT. What we have seen in Debrecen regarding Jobbik's growing strength among the young parallels our earlier observations in the southern university town of Szeged (reftel). While Fidesz has been complacent about Jobbik in the past, it appears clear that the far-right movement is a growing threat not just to Socialist, but to Fidesz interests.

LEVINE